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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000272

SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/ETC (H.LEE) AND EB/TPP/ABT (R.SINGH)
USDA FOR FAS/BIG (JPPASSINO)
DUBAI FOR MHENNEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OMAN - CARTAGENA PROTOCOL IMPLEMENTATION STATUS UPDATE

REF: 04 SECSTATE 259661

1. During a January meeting with the U.S. Agricultural Trade Officer, Oman's Director General (DG) of Specifications and Measurements at the Ministry of Commerce & Industry reconfirmed that Oman remains in the process of developing bio-safety standards to comply with its Cartagena Protocol obligations but that to date no special rules/regulations/standards have been adopted.

2. The DG noted that Oman's rule-making process is taking longer than initially projected due to delays in establishing Codex labeling guidelines (Oman's primary interest) and to drawn-out consultations with other GCC member countries over what would likely become a GCC-wide standard.

3. The DG restated several times her earlier position that Oman remains neutral towards bio-engineered foods but that her country (and most likely the GCC) would follow the lead of the international community on labeling and documentation. This stand was reiterated in a subsequent teleconference on TBT/SPS issues that the DG conducted with officials from USTR and USDA in late January.

4. Comment: Direct U.S. agricultural trade to Oman pales in comparison to the indirect trade routed through the UAE. U.S. products transshipped via the UAE consist nearly 100 percent of further processed products. Bio-engineered LMO's may possibly enter Oman as premixed animal feed containing U.S. soybeans packaged in the UAE or containing U.S. corn/soybeans packaged in Saudi Arabia. Because of inhospitable environmental factors, most Oman government officials seem less concerned with inadvertent introduction of LMO's into the environment despite the fact that it was the former Environment Minister who swayed the Sultan to sign the Cartagena Protocol.

BALTIMORE